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SUBJECT: STAFFDEL MIXTER DISCUSSES NORTHEAST ASIAN
POLITICS AND PM WEN'S TRIP TO JAPAN AND ROK WITH
CHINESE SCHOLAR

Summary

1. (SBU) China Academy of Social Sciences (CASS) Japan expert Jin Xide told Staffdel Mixter that Premier Wen's visit to Japan aims to enhance China's image in the minds of the Japanese public. Energy, including cooperation on energy conservation and the dispute over gas in the East China Sea, is a key topic of Wen's visit. Tensions over history between China and its Northeast Asian neighbors, including over PM Abe's remarks on comfort women and on the ancient Korean kingdom of Koguryo, have calmed recently. PRC-ROK relations are very strong and Sino-Japan relations are on an improving trend, Jin said, although a visit by PM Abe to Yasukuni Shrine would cause severe damage. Staffdel member Dennis Halpin raised the likelihood of protests over the comfort women issue and asked about the impact of China's environmental problems on its Northeast Asian neighbors. End Summary.

2. (SBU) Premier Wen Jiabao's visit to Japan is designed to improve the Japanese public's view of China and enhance Sino-Japanese cooperation, CASS Japan Institute scholar Jin Xide told Staffdel Mixter in an April 10 meeting. Premier Wen will focus his talks in Tokyo on security issues and joint cooperation, Jin said, not on historical issues, noting that China "would not be the first to play the history card against Abe." Bilateral tension over history sparked by former PM Koizumi's visits to Yasukuni Shrine history are being resolved in nongovernmental fields, Jin said, offering elites and businesspeople in both countries an opportunity to work on improving relations. Chinese elites had an improved view of PM Abe after his visit to China in October 2006, but the Chinese public remains wary of Abe's intentions. If Abe visits Yasukuni Shrine in October to shore up his domestic political support after Upper House elections in Japan in July, it would do severe damage to otherwise improving bilateral relations with both China and the ROK, according to Jin.

3. (SBU) Staffdel member Dennis Halpin said Japan wants a seat on the UNSC, resolution of disputes over oil and gas in the East China Sea and Chinese support for its position on the abduction of Japanese citizens by North Korea. But, he asked, what does China want from Japan? Jin said Japan's "attitude of dominance" is China's biggest difficulty. Premier Wen would also

discuss with PM Abe China's concerns about security issues, especially as relates to Taiwan. Jin confirmed Halpin's statement that China had wanted language on Taiwan inserted into the joint communiqué signed during Wen's visit, while Japan had wanted language on DPRK abductions. Neither side got what it wanted, Jin noted, so the joint communiqué focused on bilateral cooperation on energy and energy conservation.

¶4. (SBU) Halpin asked about Chinese views toward the ROK and whether dispute continues over some Koreans view that ancient Koguryo kingdom once included Chinese territory. Jin said bilateral relations between China and the ROK are very good and that few people other than historians focused on the Koguryo issue today. The Chinese leadership does not understand how sensitive these issues are for Koreans, said Jin (noting that he is ethnic Korean). Jin confirmed that CASS has a special research institute that looks at border disputes and frontier issues with all of its neighbors. One such institute, the Northeast Project, has done significant research on Koguryo, Jin said, but the project does not target the ROK in any way. The Chinese government believes Koguryo is a question of historical research. Neither Beijing nor Seoul wants this to become a diplomatic or territorial issue, Jin said, although he noted that ROK President Roh did raise the issue in a bilateral meeting on the margins of the East Asian Summit earlier this year.

¶5. (SBU) Halpin told Jin that groups in the United States were angered by Premier Abe's remarks about comfort women and would likely protest during Abe's

visit to Washington at the end of the month. Groups were also planning to ask Chinese government permission to demonstrate in front of the Japanese Embassy in Beijing. A study group from Japan's LDP is interested at looking into history issues, including the Nanjing massacre, Halpin said. Jin expressed interest in the developments and said Chinese views are divided on the impact of PM Abe's remarks on comfort women. China will wait to see, Jin said, whether the remarks reflect a Japanese strategy to try to show its strength by denying WWII history or whether they are mistaken remarks supported by only a few.

Environmental Issues Affect Northeast Asian Affairs -----

¶6. (SBU) In a separate meeting, Halpin asked about the impact of China's environmental problems on relations in Northeast Asia. MFA Treaty and Law (Kyoto Protocol) Department DDG Su Wei said dust storms from China that affect neighboring countries were better this year than last year. China was very active in planting trees to prevent desertification, he said. In response to a question about Premier Wen's visit to Japan and the ongoing oil and natural gas dispute in the East China Sea, DDG Su said discussions about energy in the East China Sea were ongoing and would likely be a topic of Premier Wen's visit to Tokyo, but added that this is not his area of expertise or responsibility.

¶7. (U) This message is SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED and should not be distributed outside the USG or posted on the Internet. The Staffdel did not have an opportunity to clear this message.

